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State Fire Marshal “Fired Up” Over Gas Grill Safety

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan said, “Take a few minutes for safety as you fire up the grill this Memorial Day weekend.” In 2005, there were 37 grill fires reported to the Massachusetts Fire Incident Reporting System (MFIRS) and 95% of them involved LP-gas grills. Each fire caused an average of \$7,300 in property damage. Seventy percent of these fires occurred between May and September. Coan said, “A grill fire can really start the summer off on the wrong foot.”

Check for Leaks

“Check to make sure all the connections are tight and secure before firing up the gas grill for the first time this season,” said Fire Marshal Coan. “Using a brush, apply a soapy solution made of one part detergent and one part water to the tank connection. If the solution bubbles, you have a leak that needs repair,” said Coan. He suggested checking for and replacing any cracked hoses.

LP-Gas Tanks Not Permitted in Homes or on Balconies Above the 1st Floor

LP-gas (liquid propane) cylinders are not permitted inside homes or on balconies above the first floor of any building where people live (527 Code of Massachusetts Regulations Section 6:07). Coan said, “A leaky grill could pose a hazard to people below because LP-gas is heavier than air and sinks. A car or someone smoking a cigarette below could ignite the fumes, or the vapors could enter the building through a door, window or dryer vent and find a pilot light, an air conditioner, or a compressor as an ignition source.”

Use 10 Feet Away From Buildings

Coan added, “Keep LP-gas tanks upright, five feet away from building openings and ignition sources such as doors, window, dryer vents, air intake vents, pilot lights, and appliance compressors. It is even better to keep and use gas grills ten feet away from the house.” All LP-gas cylinders between 4 and 40 lbs. must be equipped with an overfill protection device.

Recent Gas Grill Fires Show How Dangerous It Can Be

- ◆ On January 18, 2005 at 4:19 a.m. the Wayland Fire Department was called to a fire where a gas grill located inside the building ignited the interior wall of a single-family home. The fire was limited to the room of origin. There were no injuries associated with this fire. Smoke detectors were present and alerted the occupants. The estimated dollar loss of this incident was \$6,000. Sprinklers were not present.
- ◆ On April 11, 2005 at 1:48 p.m. the Arlington Fire Department was called to a fire where a gas grill located on the first floor porch ignited the wall of a single-family home. The fire quickly spread throughout building. There were no injuries associated with this fire. Smoke detectors were not present in the building. The estimated dollar loss of this incident was \$175,000. Sprinklers were not present.
- ◆ On July 4, 2005 at 6:35 p.m. the Plymouth Fire Department was called to a fire where a gas grill located near the wall of a single-family home ignited the exterior wall. The fire confined to the exterior wall. There were no injuries associated with this fire. Smoke detectors were present but did not operate because the fire was too small to activate. The estimated dollar loss of this incident was \$7,000. Sprinklers were not present.
- ◆ On July 26, 2005 at 7:30 p.m. the Carver Fire Department was called to a fire where a gas grill located on the first floor unenclosed porch where it ignited the wall of a single-family home. The fire spread to both floors of the building. There were no injuries associated with this fire. It was undetermined if smoke detectors were present in the building. The estimated dollar loss of this incident was \$75,000. Sprinklers were not present.

Barbecue Safety Tips

- Supervise children whenever any grill is in use.
- Never use gasoline on any grill.
- Use all barbecue grills away from the house - ten feet is recommended.
- Use only charcoal lighter fluid to start charcoal grills.
- Do not add more once the coals have been lit – flames may travel up the stream of lighter fluid causing serious burns.
- Don't use charcoal grills on combustible surfaces such as wooden porches.
- Let coals cool overnight before disposing in a metal container.
- Store and use all LP-gas outside, five feet away from building opening and possible ignition sources, such as doors, window, dryer vents air intake vents, pilot lights, appliance compressors and smoking materials. Ten feet is better.
- Keep propane tanks upright to prevent leaks and ensure proper functioning of the pressure relief valve.

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